

REMARKS

Status of the Claims

Claims 1-17 are currently pending.

Claims 1-3, 5-13 and 17 are currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,515,655 to Hoffman (hereinafter the "Hoffman" reference).

Claims 14 and 15 are currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being rendered obvious by Hoffman.

Claim 4 is currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being rendered obvious by Hoffman in view of U.S. Des. Patent No. 293,934 to Lambert *et al.* (hereinafter the "Lambert" reference). Claim 4 is also currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being rendered obvious by German reference DE 198 36 369 C1 to Krinner *et al.* (hereinafter the "Krinner" reference) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,412,235 to Pylant (hereinafter the "Pylant" reference), in further view of Lambert.

Claims 1, 3, 5-8 and 12-15 are currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being rendered obvious by Krinner in view of Pylant.

Claims 2, 9, 16 and 17 are currently rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being rendered obvious by Krinner in view of Pylant, in further view of U.S. Patent No. 6,517,442 to Post (hereinafter the "Post" reference) and U.S. Patent No. 4,022,437 (hereinafter the "French" reference).

Independent claims 1, 5, and 14 have been amended herein to recite that the tubes each have an end that is a substantially hollow, open end. No new matter has been added by these amendments. Support for these amendments can be found throughout the specification of the instant application, including, for example, at page 2 lines 21-28, and page 4 lines 11-13, page 6 lines 7-12, and Figure 2. The Applicants respectfully submit that the pending rejections have been overcome by the amendments presented herein, and that application is now in a condition for allowance.

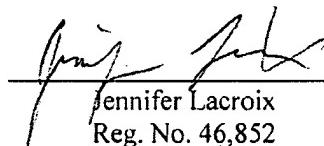
CONCLUSION

In view of the amendments and remarks presented above, the Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1-17 as currently presented are in a condition for allowance.

Applicant believes that no fee is currently due in conjunction with this submission. The Commissioner is, however, hereby authorized to charge any fees that may be necessary, or credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 18-2284, in the name of DLA Piper US LLP.

Respectfully submitted,

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